

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 8, 2012 **Agenda Item:** Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis Working Group Recommendations **Bureau:** Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 1 hour

Background

Brucellosis, the result of bacterial infection, exists in wild bison and elk and occasionally domestic livestock within the Greater Yellowstone Area. Recent livestock cases in the GYA were linked to transmission from wildlife, with elk the most likely source. While significant negative impacts to elk have not been clearly identified in Montana, brucellosis can impact the livestock industry. Changes in USDA-APHIS rules reduced the likelihood of entire states losing brucellosis-free status because of isolated livestock cases, but put a focus on areas where brucellosis is known to exist in wildlife. As a result, the Montana Board of Livestock established a designated surveillance area in Montana in 2010. Livestock growers within the DSA are required to increase their cattle testing and vaccination efforts. Montana surveillance efforts, using blood tests to determine exposure rates (seroprevalence) to the bacteria among elk began in the late 1980s. Seroprevalence estimates for GYA elk from the late 1980s and early 1990s were below 2 percent. Surveillance conducted within the past 10-15 years reveals what appears to be increasing seroprevalence in some elk populations.

In 2011 the FWP Commission endorsed a citizen working group concept to explore elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis. After an informational meeting that included research and management presentations from Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Yellowstone National Park, the group crafted an issue statement, objectives and alternative actions over six meetings between January and June 2012. The alternative predicted by the working group to best address objectives generally identifies efforts to adjust elk distribution. Potential actions include hunting season and habitat adjustments. The recommendations are presented in a general format and the working group suggests that new, or existing, local groups represent a critical element in helping FWP identify and implement specific management actions. Depending on the specific action, additional commission approval may be required prior to local implementation. At this time, the commission may endorse the working group's issue statement and objectives in addition to the recommended alternative.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment will run through 5 p.m., Dec. 20. FWP will also solicit review and input from others working with brucellosis in the GYA. Any final commission adoption would take place in January.

Alternatives and Analysis

Alternatives include adoption as proposed or with adjustment, additions or deletions. The commission could identify other management considerations or could choose not to adopt these recommendations.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends adopting the proposed issue statement, fundamental objectives and action alternative and establishing a public comment period to help further assess these items.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission adopt the proposed issue statement, fundamental objectives and action alternative from the Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis Working Group.